

Transportation Commission

January 25, 2012

Item 4D

Action

City of Alameda Paratransit Taxi Service Proposed Modification – Charge \$2.50 per Voucher for Medical Return Trip Improvement Program (MRTIP)

Background

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires transit agencies to offer equivalent paratransit service for persons certified as unable to drive or take public transit. Paratransit services must be made available to eligible users within 3/4 mile of the existing fixed transit routes during normal operating hours. In Alameda, the mandated paratransit service is provided by East Bay Paratransit (EBP).

Measure B, the Alameda County half-cent sales tax for transportation, provides a dedicated funding source for non-mandated, locally based paratransit services for individuals with disabilities and seniors, which are not required under ADA. The City of Alameda uses these funds to supplement EBP and to reduce transportation gaps experienced by individuals with disabilities and by seniors by providing taxi services, the Alameda Paratransit Shuttle, group trips and a scholarship program.

As part of the City's non-mandated Paratransit program, the City of Alameda offers two taxi services to Alameda residents: the Medical Return Trip Improvement Program (MRTIP) and the Premium Taxi Service. MRTIP is available free of charge to EBP certified riders traveling within Alameda County. This service provides free taxi trips when returning home from medical appointments, thereby eliminating the uncertainty of coordinating return trips with EBP. Eligible residents may use up to five MRTIP travel vouchers per month. MRTIP travel vouchers are valid for one year.

The Premium Taxi Service provides eligible Alameda residents a 50 percent discount on taxi rides within Alameda County. This service is available to residents who are: EBP-certified; 75 years of age or older; or 70 years of age or older without a driver's license. Premium Taxi Service travel vouchers, which must be purchased in advance, are valued at \$5.00 but cost the user \$2.50. Individuals are limited to a maximum of ten travel vouchers per quarter, and multiple travel vouchers may be used per trip. Premium Taxi Service travel vouchers are valid for one year.

On November 3, 2009, the City Council approved the initiation of a Paratransit Shuttle service with the goal to reduce motor vehicle trips by seniors and by individuals with disabilities and to reduce the dependence on Paratransit taxi services within the City. As part of the initiation of the shuttle service, staff presented a three-year financial analysis to the City Council, which showed a negative balance in future years if all

Paratransit programs were kept fully intact. At that time, staff indicated that should the shuttle service prove effective then some of the Paratransit programs would need to be modified to continue funding the shuttle service. The shuttle service has proved to be successful, and staff is recommending a modification to MRTIP to address cost over runs.

Discussion

There are currently 584 individuals enrolled in the City of Alameda Paratransit taxi program with approximately 60 active users per month. This usage represents only a small portion of the population that is eligible to receive these program benefits. According to the 2010 US Census, there are over 7,000 Alameda residents 70 years and older, which represents ten percent of Alameda's population. According to five years of American Community Survey data (2005-2010), there are almost 7,200 Alameda residents with disabilities, which also totals about ten percent of Alameda's population. Note that some Alameda residents are both 70 years and older and have a disability.

Public Works Department staff is recommending charging eligible residents \$2.50 per MRTIP travel voucher. Staff analyses show that the average MRTIP trip cost totals almost \$24 per trip over the past year (Exhibit 1 - Table 1). In comparison, the average trip cost for the Premium Taxi Service is under \$5 and the average trip cost for the Alameda Paratransit Shuttle is \$15 over the past year. About 1,000 MRTIP trips were taken, which averages to almost 84 trips per month. In comparison, there were over 600 Premium Taxi Service trips and almost 5,200 Alameda Paratransit Shuttle trips.

The Mastick Senior Center and Public Works Department staffs conducted an annual survey of the Alameda Paratransit Program. During the 2011 survey, the City received a total of 142 completed questionnaires by the December 16, 2011 deadline. Survey results are shown on Exhibit 2 (Table 2). The majority of the survey respondents stated that the drivers were courteous; the vehicles were clean; the services were punctual; and the respondents were satisfied. When applicable, the drivers secured the wheelchairs properly and the service animals were treated properly.

Exhibit 3 (Table 3) refers to survey results pertaining specifically to the City's taxi services and then to the Alameda Paratransit Shuttle service. The majority of survey respondents stated that they would use MRTIP if it cost \$3 per MRTIP travel voucher instead of being free. The majority of the survey respondents prefer the shuttle to remain available only to seniors and individuals with disabilities rather than the general public.

Staff conducted a review of Paratransit taxi services offered by four other cities in north Alameda County, and determined that with one exception (Berkeley), all jurisdictions charge a nominal fee for their paratransit taxi services. For example, Oakland charges \$3 for taxi travel vouchers valued at \$10; Albany reimburses 70 percent of the metered

fare; and Emeryville reimburses 90 percent of the metered fare. This recommendation will reduce the overall costs to the program, is consistent with neighboring jurisdictions, and allows the City to apply the cost savings to the Alameda Paratransit Shuttle service. This recommendation is consistent with the service level guidelines that the Alameda County Transportation Commission's (Alameda CTC) Paratransit Advisory and Planning Committee (PAPCO) has approved and with Alameda CTC's Draft Implementing Guidelines for Measure B funded City-based programs.

As for next steps, Public Works Department staff will present the proposed Paratransit Taxi Service Program Modification to the Transportation Commission (January), Recreation and Park Commission (January), Social Service Human Relations Board (January or February) and the Commission on Disability Issues (January). In April, Public Works Department staff will ask the City Council to approve next fiscal year's Paratransit work scope and budget.

Budget Considerations/Fiscal Impacts

The Paratransit taxi services are funded by Measure B, an Alameda County half-cent sales tax for transportation, and are included in the Public Works Department's budget for fiscal year 2011-2012, Paratransit (4225287). This program is not funded by the General Fund.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Transportation Commission review and provide comments on implementing a \$2.50 charge for the Medical Return Trip Improvement Program (MRTIP) Paratransit taxi service to meet budgetary constraints.

Exhibits

1. MRTIP Participant Usage
2. City of Alameda Paratransit Survey Results
3. City of Alameda Paratransit Survey Results (cont.)

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Exhibit 1

Table 1: MRTIP Participant Usage

| | 2010 | 2011 | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | June | July | Aug | Sept | Oct | Nov |
| Active Users | 42 | 48 | 35 | 40 | 39 | 40 | 41 | 45 | 39 | 37 | 32 | 34 |
| MRTIP Trips | 98 | 104 | 91 | 89 | 83 | 65 | 96 | 87 | 87 | 64 | 69 | 79 |
| Monthly Cost | \$2.3k | \$2.3k | \$2.3k | \$2.0k | \$1.9k | \$1.5k | \$2.0k | \$1.9k | \$1.8k | \$1.6k | \$2.0k | \$2.0k |
| Av. Cost/ Trip | \$24 | \$22 | \$25 | \$23 | \$23 | \$24 | \$21 | \$22 | \$21 | \$24 | \$29 | \$26 |

Exhibit 2

Table 2: City of Alameda Paratransit Survey Results

| | Shuttle | Taxi Services | EBP |
|--|----------------|----------------------|------------|
| Did you use a lift van? (for taxi services or EBP) | | 25% (yes) | 38% (yes) |
| Was it easy to schedule the ride with the dispatcher? (for taxi services or EBP) | | 97% (yes) | 94% (yes) |
| Was the driver courteous? | 100% (yes) | 98% (yes) | 98% (yes) |
| Was the vehicle clean? | 100% (yes) | 98% (yes) | 97% (yes) |
| Were you picked up on time? | 90% (yes) | 96% (yes) | 88% (yes) |
| Did you arrive at your destination on time? | 94% (yes) | 94% (yes) | 87% (yes) |
| Are you satisfied with this service? | 100% (yes) | 96% (yes) | 94% (yes) |
| If applicable: | | | |
| Did the driver secure your wheelchair or other mobility device properly? | 100% (yes) | 89% (yes) | 100% (yes) |
| Was your service animal permitted to travel with you? | 67% (yes) | 50% (yes) | 50% (yes) |
| Was your service animal treated properly? | 67% (yes) | 50% (yes) | 50% (yes) |

Note: Note that the questions on service animals are difficult to verify if a negative response meant “not applicable.”

Exhibit 3

Table 3: City of Alameda Paratransit Survey Results

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Taxi Services | |
| If MRTIP were to cost \$3 per MRTIP travel voucher instead of being free, would you use it? | 75% (yes) |
| Did you use Welcome Transport Group? | 57% (yes) |
| Did you use Veterans Cab? | 26% (yes) |
| Did you use Friendly Transportation Company? | 36% (yes) |
| Did you use MRTIP? | 52% (yes) |
| Did you use Premium Taxi Service? | 34% (yes) |
| City of Alameda Paratransit Shuttle | |
| Did you use the West Loop (Tuesday) route? | 25% (yes) |
| Did you use the East Loop (Wednesday) route? | 11% (yes) |
| Did you use the Central Loop (Thursday) route? | 13% (yes) |
| Are you in favor of allowing the shuttle to be open to the general public? | 31% (yes) |
| Do you prefer the shuttle to remain only open to seniors and individuals with disabilities? | 81% (yes) |